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ABSTRACT

A self-report survey was mailed to 150 Hispanic students attending the University of Maryland (College Park) to assess the extent to which Hispanics become involved in activities and ethnic organizations, feel that they have special needs at the University, and identify with the University and the minority student office on campus. Results from 109 respondents showed that Hispanic males living off campus with their families had less time than Hispanic males living on campus to participate in activities at the University. Hispanics who participated in non-Hispanic groups, compared with those who did not, thought they had time for activities on campus and that Hispanics had no special needs at the University. Hispanic females, compared with Hispanic males, tended to feel that Hispanic students had special needs on campus. A descriptive analysis of other item means revealed ambivalent feelings by Hispanics; specifically, they felt a part of the University yet wanted more support from the Office of Minority Student Education.
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Students at a Predominantly White University

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Franklin D. Westbrook

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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY

Jairo Fuertes, William E. Sedlacek,
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Summary

A self-report survey was mailed to 150 Hispanic students attending the University of Maryland, College Park.

The respondents were 44% male, and 54% female (2% unspecified), 25% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 28% juniors, 21% seniors, and 1% "other". Twenty eight percent lived on campus, 56% off campus with their families, 14% off campus with others, and 2% off campus alone. Sixty three percent were born in the U.S., 7% belonged to an Hispanic organization on campus, and 35% belonged to a non-Hispanic organization on campus. Also, 86% of the respondents had heard of the Office of Minority Student Education on campus, yet 73% responded that they had not used its services before. An assessment of the extent to which Hispanics become involved in activities and ethnic organizations, feel that they have special needs at the University, and identify with the University and the minority student office on campus was conducted.

Results showed that Hispanic males living off campus with their families had less time than Hispanic males living on campus to participate in activities at the University. Hispanics who participated in non-Hispanic groups, compared with those who did not, thought they had time for activities on campus and that Hispanics had no special needs at the University. Hispanic females, compared with Hispanic males, tended to feel that Hispanic students had special needs on campus. A descriptive analysis of other item means revealed ambivalent feelings by Hispanics, specifically, they felt a part of the University yet wanted more support from the Office of Minority Student Education.

In the last thirty years minorities have begun to enroll increasingly in predominantly White universities (Fleming, 1984). Enrollment data for the decade of the 1980's show that four out of every five minority students enrolled in higher education did so at predominantly White colleges and universities (Livingston & Stewart, 1987). However, it has been difficult for minority students at such schools to adjust academically and socially to campus life (Garza & Nelson, 1973; Hunt, 1975; Lyon, 1973; Olivas, 1982; Sedlacek, 1987). Minority groups have reported not feeling welcome at traditionally White campuses, and of being treated like uninvited guests in a strange land (Parker & Scott, 1985).

The task of understanding the situations of minority students in predominantly White universities is becoming more complex. Researchers are beginning to identify differences in views and perspectives among minority groups (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983). Among groups, minorities have been shown to differ in their aspirations and expectations of college life (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1983), and in what they identify as their main problems in higher education (Westbrook, Miyares, & Roberts, 1978; Webster, Sedlacek, & Miyares, 1979).

Differences in attitudes, experiences and perspectives among Hispanic, Black, and Asian-American university students have been found in several studies (Patterson & Sedlacek, 1979; Patterson, Sedlacek, & Perry, 1984). Also, White and Sedlacek (1987) suggest that Hispanics may experience less oppression than Black students at predominantly White campuses because the attitudes of White students are somewhat more positive toward Hispanics than they are toward Blacks, although they are still negative.

In the past, most research on minorities has been done by combining different minority groups into studies and generically analyzing and interpreting their responses. It seems logical now that to obtain good information on a particular group, that group should be analyzed independently from the global minority community. Those doing global assessments so far have ignored the particular needs of different minority groups (Keller, Piotrowski, & Sherry, 1982). It was the purpose of this study to assess the extent to which Hispanic students at a large eastern university become involved in activities and ethnic organizations, feel that they have special needs at the university, and identify with the university and the minority student office on campus.

METHOD

The needs assessment consisted of two parts. The first part involved interviews with ten randomly selected Hispanic students chosen from groups of successful and unsuccessful students; five students with G.P.A.'s below 2.0 and five students with G.P.A.'s of 3.2 and above. The second part of the needs assessment was the administration of a questionnaire developed from the interviews; it included 28 Likert items and 2 ordinal items. The items were grouped via an inter-rater reliability system into three sections by trained assistants. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), using gender, living arrangement, class standing, and membership in non-Hispanic organizations as independent variables. All differences reported were significant at the .05 level. A descriptive discussion of other items is included.

The questionnaire was mailed to 150 randomly selected Hispanic students, and follow-up letters and phone calls resulted in 109 returns (75%). There were 5 eliminations because of incorrect addresses. The respondents were 44% male, 54% female (2% unspecified), 25% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 28% juniors, 21% seniors, and 1% "other". Twenty eight percent lived on campus, 56% off campus with family, 14% off campus with others, and 2% off campus alone. Sixty three percent were born in the U.S., 7% belonged to an Hispanic organization on campus, and 35% belonged to a non-Hispanic organization on campus.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the grouped Likert items. The first group assessed attitudes toward involvement in activities and organizations. Group 2 assessed their views on having special needs at a predominantly White university, and group 3 assessed the extent to which they identified with the university and the minority student office on campus. Six other items were not identified as belonging in the above groups. Table 2 shows the results for 2 ordinal items.

INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

MANOVA results show that male Hispanics living on campus, compared with male Hispanics living off campus with their families, felt they had more time for student groups (Item 4, $p<.05$). Hispanics who belonged to non-Hispanic groups compared to those who did not, felt it was important to participate in student groups (Item 3, $p<.05$), and that they had more time to participate in them (Item 4, $p<.05$). They felt that minority

student groups should provide Hispanics academic and financial support rather than political or cultural awareness (Item 24).

HAVING SPECIAL NEEDS

MANOVA results show that Hispanics who were not in non-Hispanic groups, compared with those who were, felt that they had special needs on campus (Item 13, $p<.05$). Males, when compared to females, felt that Hispanics have no special needs on campus (Item 13, $p<.05$); the largest difference occurred at the sophomore year. The reasons Hispanic students drop out or fail were seen as financial or motivational (Item 23).

IDENTITY WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND MINORITY OFFICE

It is interesting to note that 86% of the respondents had heard of the minority student office on campus (Item 14), yet 73% responded that they had not used its services before (Item 22). Hispanics reported having a sense of belonging at the university (Item 15), yet they wanted to know more about the minority office (Item 16), and they wanted this office to take greater interest in Hispanics (Item 17).

Correlations showed that the more years a student spent in the U.S. the more likely they were to feel a sense of belonging at the university ($r= -.30$, $p<.05$), and the more non-Hispanic friends they had on campus ($r= -.25$, $p<.05$). Also, the more time they had spent in the U.S., the less interest they had in seeing the minority student office on campus involved with Hispanic students ($r=.20$, $p<.05$), and the less likely they were to have

Hispanic friends ($r=.30$, $p<.05$). As the number of years spent in the U.S. increased, the more likely the students felt that Hispanics had no special needs at the university ($r=.17$, $p<.05$).

DISCUSSION

Hispanics who feel it is important to be involved in campus activities appear to be able to find groups that will accept them. However, a large number of Hispanics (58%) felt that it was not important to join organizations. Astin (1985) has argued that campus involvement is essential for student development, and Sedlacek (1987) has shown that campus/community activity is important for minority student success at predominantly White institutions. Incoming Hispanic students ought to be informed (at orientation, for example) about the importance of being involved on campus. Hispanic students who are active in school will more likely develop a sense of belonging on campus, develop friendships with support persons in their college, and meet role models.

Hispanics living off campus reported having little time for campus activities and organizations. These students may not be getting as much information or encouragement to get involved on campus from the university or their families (Quevedo-Garcia, 1987). Conversely, students living on campus may have greater access to information on activities and organizations than students living off campus. They may also be more encouraged by their peers to join or participate in groups and activities. Support units could encourage students living off campus to become involved in activities during the evenings or weekends, or to become involved in activities in their communities. Also, for

Hispanic students who have responsibilities off campus, certain college advancement courses (e.g. time-management skills) may be especially helpful.

Hispanics who join non-Hispanic groups on campus are less likely, than Hispanics who do not, to feel that Hispanics have special needs on campus. It appears that the students who join non-Hispanic groups find themselves in the mainstream and that their needs are met. Hispanic students who do not join non-Hispanic groups may perceive a culture-gap with these groups, and may prefer to join/create Hispanic organizations or pre-professional societies on their campus. These groups may help Hispanics meet two basic needs: affiliation and representation. Support units ought to be aware of these needs and be ready to help Hispanics organize their own groups.

Hispanic students who have representative groups to join at predominantly White campuses may feel less socially isolated and less culturally alienated. These groups may also help Hispanics develop socially and emotionally (Chickering, 1969), and help balance the challenge and support equation Sanford (1967) proposes is essential for college success. Junior and senior Hispanic students reported increasing agreement with the statement that Hispanic students have special needs in college, evidence that as they progress in college, they realize that school is difficult and special support is needed.

Evidence that students know the minority student office exists and think it is important, yet choose not to use it may seem surprising. However, Schneider (1987) has discussed that environments tend to be shaped by the predominant groups that

inhabit them, and they discourage those that are different. Because the largest minority group on this campus is Black, and the minority student office has hired mostly Black staff, Hispanic students may not feel that the office is responsible for responding to them. Results show Hispanics wanted to know more about the minority student office and for this office to take greater interest in them. It is incumbent upon the minority student office to assure through its programming (e.g. activites that focus exclusively on Hispanic student needs) and its staffing patterns that Hispanics who have special needs are able to have them met.

Another reason Hispanics do not utilize the services of the minority student office may be that as they acculturate to the culture of a predominantly white campus, their attitudes and perceptions of the college environment become more in line with those of Whites (Born, 1970; Padilla, Alvarez, & Lindholm, 1986). Future research concerning Hispanics could examine the effects of acculturation, specifically to explain how it affects a Hispanic student's help-seeking behaviors in college.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Likert* Items

	Mean	S.D.
Extent to which Hispanics become involved in activities and ethnic organizations.		
1. I am interested in belonging to an organization which is made up of students in my major, regardless of its ethnic make up.	2.15	1.03
2. I wish there were more Hispanic organizations on campus.	2.52	.85
3. It is important to me to participate in an organization on campus.	2.54	.95
4. I do not have time for student organizations on campus.	2.73	1.02
5. It is important to me to join a Hispanic student organization on campus.	2.90	.95
6. I do not think of myself as an ethnic minority.	3.21	1.29
7. It is important to me to join a majority student organization on campus.	3.22	.84
8. I believe Hispanic organizations on campus segregate and isolate Hispanic students.	3.29	.94
Extent to which Hispanics agree they have special needs in the university.		
9. I think Hispanic students have special needs on campus.	2.59	.97
10. I think Hispanic students face greater difficulties than Caucasian students organizing activities on campus.	2.73	1.06
11. My main concern each year at the university is being able to get financial aid.	3.32	1.36
12. I think Hispanic students at the university are victims of racism.	3.65	1.02
13. I believe Hispanic students have no special needs on campus.	3.50	1.05

Table 1 (con't.)

Extent to which Hispanics identify with the university and the minority student office on campus.

	Mean	S.D.
14. I have heard of the Office of Minority Student Education (OMSE) at the university.	1.86	.97
15. I have a sense of "belonging" at the university.	2.33	1.01
16. I know little about OMSE but would like to know more about it.	2.39	1.04
17. I would like to see OMSE take a greater interest in Hispanic students on campus.	2.46	.79
18. I think the university is supportive of minority student issues on campus.	2.55	.92
19. I believe the university is supportive of Hispanic students on campus.	2.79	.81
20. OMSE does a good job of representing Hispanic students on campus.	2.97	.73
21. I do not think OMSE is in tune with the problems of Hispanic students on campus.	3.03	.73
22. I have made use of the services OMSE provides at least once before.	3.99	1.19

* Based on a 5-point scale, 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree

Table 2

Ranks for Ordinal Items

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23. Please indicate what you think is the most likely reason Hispanic students drop out or fail to graduate from the university. Use "6" for most likely and "1" for least likely.

	Rank
- Financial difficulties.	6
- Lack of Motivation.	5
- Size of the campus.	4
- Racism.	3
- Lack of intellectual capacity.	2
- Illness.	1

24. Please indicate your preference for functions of a minority student group on campus. Use "6" for most preferable and "1" for least preferable.

	Rank
- Provide academic support.	6
- Provide Financial Aid information.	5
- Provide social activities.	4
- Promote cultural awareness.	3
- Maintain ethnic identity.	2
- Political awareness.	1

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